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ABSTRACT

A developmental writing program created for grades three through six is described in this paper. The first half of the paper describes the four-phase instructional model, which includes teacher-directed prewriting activities; successive drafts; editing by the writer, by peer editors, and by the instructor; and a publishing stage. The second half of the paper describes the program's model for staff development: administrator and staff orientation, teacher training, and program monitoring. The questions, procedures and results from an evaluation of the program are included. (HTH)

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Writing with Style

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Running Head: Writing

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
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Abstract

Presents description of instructional model, training component, and evaluation results for the Developmental Writing Program (DWP), a process-oriented composition program for students in grades 3-6.

Writing with Style

" ...You are strolling down a lonely lane one day and suddenly encounter a dragon. Write about your experience. Include a description of the dragon and tell a little about your meeting."

--writing assignment, intermediate grades

Introduction

How would your elementary grade students respond to this assignment? How would your teachers react? What would be your criteria for a "worthy composition"? If students wrote poor papers, how would you help them? For more than a decade, little consideration was given to teaching composition to our elementary grade students. During the past three year, however, we in Hillsborough County have pondered these questions and their answers. We attribute part of our interest in this curriculum area to national concerns that many students lack rudimentary writing skills (Boyer, 1983; Solomon, 1984). To determine the validity of these concerns in our district, instructional staff members conducted an informal evaluation of students' writing using a prompt similar to the one given above. Results of the evaluation raised eyebrows and questions about our efficacy in the teaching of language arts. It also confirmed the need for some sort of systematic writing instruction within the elementary program. Hence, the Hillsborough

County Developmental Writing Program (DWP) was conceived for students and teachers in grades three through six.

A detailed discussion of established program components and results of the most recent program evaluation follow.

Instructional Model

The Developmental Writing Program (DWP) instructional model is based on the premise that effective writing instruction results in technical and stylistic competence as well as the development of creative expression. In order to accomplish these ends, attention is given to all aspects of the writing process. Thus, the DWP utilizes a four-phase instructional model which includes teacher-directed pre-writing activities, drafting, tri-level editing and revising, and publishing. The model combines and modifies aspects of instructional philosophies and techniques espoused by contemporary educators (Emig, 1971; Graves, 1974; Murray 1976; Rothstein, 1981; Gazda-Grace, 1984).

Pre-Writing

Pre-writing, the initial phase of the writing process, precedes the act of composing. Teachers present purposeful pre-writing activities which prepare students for the act of composing by stimulating an awareness of precise, descriptive language, establishing a purpose for writing and generating ideas for topics within the writer's background of experience.

Drafting

Draft copies are defined as the first and all subsequent copies which precede the final or published copy. These drafts, utilizing a format characterized by skipped lines, enable the writer to transcribe thoughts freely without concern for form or convention. Use of this format facilitates improvement without erasures, thereby expediting the editing and revising process.

Editing and Revising

Completed first drafts are improved by means of a three-step editing process. After self-editing, the writer selects a peer to help locate overlooked mechanical errors. Then the peer editor reads the piece to be certain the writer's ideas are stated clearly and that descriptions are precise and varied. When necessary revisions have been made, the writer shares the work with the teacher or "top editor". During this process the teacher and writer review the revised draft and discuss possible solutions to any remaining problems related to usage or style. At the conclusion of this conference, the writer prepares his final or published copy.

Publishing

Sharing, or publishing, one's work is equally as important as composing it. Therefore, students are encouraged to read their final

products aloud, to post them on classroom and schoolwide bulletin boards, and to submit them to class and school newsletters and/or anthologies.

The Staff Development Model

In order to communicate the DWP instructional model to key personnel in the district, a three-pronged staff development design is utilized. Three major components comprising the staff development design include administrator and staff orientation, teacher training activities, and a systematic on-site program monitoring and support procedure.

Administrator and Staff Orientation

Prior to implementing the DWP in schools, project directors meet with principals to present an overview of the curriculum rationale and design, staff development structure, and program evaluation model. Principals then are asked to confirm participating teacher recommendations, to certify their willingness to support the DWP and to depart from traditional language arts instruction at their schools.

Immediately thereafter, project directors meet with teachers and curriculum intervention specialists to present an overview of the staff development model and program guidelines and to provide copies of selected training and instructional materials. The primary material for the program is a locally-produced resource guide entitled "DWP Teacher Guide and Activity Book."

Teacher Training

Throughout the semester, teachers attend three appropriately spaced full-day training sessions to study methodology, to discuss effective use of instructional materials and to apply and strengthen their personal writing skills. Teachers are encouraged to bring samples of their students' work to share, discuss and evaluate. They also identify specific topics they wish to have clarified during the next training session.

The original pilot study teacher group proved to be outstanding in that they supported both the program and each other throughout the initial program phase. We selected members of this group to comprise two teacher-training cadres to work with project directors and to be involved in training writing teachers throughout th district.

Program Monitoring

A carefully-designed monitoring system contributes significantly to the overall effectiveness of the staff development mode. During the initial training session, project directors explain that the purposes for on-site visits are to observe program implementation and provide support or assistance where needed. During each visit, teachers are expected to share activities which they regard as particularly successful. Also, project directors talk with students and other teachers to determine the program's overall effectiveness. Each teacher is visited at least twice during their initial year of implementation.

Evaluation Questions, Procedures, and Results

All of the aforementioned activities occurred during the 1983-84 school year and were the basis for a thorough investigation. Although project directors intuitively believed that the DWP was successful, they were gratified to learn that their feelings were substantiated by formal evaluative procedures. Both principals and teachers were aware that they and their students were participating in evaluation of the program's effectiveness.

Project directors, evaluators, principals, and teachers wanted to determine answers to these questions:

1) Is student writing better after DWP instruction?

2) Do students who receive instruction in the DWP write better than students who receive a different type of writing instruction?

3) Do students who receive instruction in the DWP perform as well as other students on achievement tests measuring traditional language conventions?

4) Is student attitude toward writing different after DWP instruction?

5) Is teacher attitude toward writing different after DWP participation?

To address these research questions a number of data collection procedures occurred. Pre and post writing samples were co'lected from DWP students and students enrolled in classes where the DWP was not implemented. Each writing sample was rated on a scale of "1" to "4" by a team of rigorously trained scorers who had no inkling as to each paper's pre or post status. Achievement test scores in the areas of reading comprehension, language mechanics, and language expression were obtained for each student under investigation. Teacher and student attitude surveys were administered on a pre-post basis to measure attitudes towards writing and the teaching of writing.

Based on results of these procedures, the following conclusions about the DWP were drawn.

1) At least 70 percent of students who participated in the Developmental Writing Program exhibited improved writing skills after eight months of instruction. Fifty-seven percent of students who did not participate in the Developmental Writing Program, but who may have received other types of writing instruction, also exhibited improved writing skills after eight months in school. However, when compared with these other instructional methods, the Developmental Writing Program was significantly more effective in improving students' writing skills. That is, Developmental Writing Program students showed a greater degree of improvement than other students.

2) The Developmental Writing Program proved at least as effective as more traditional types of language arts instruction in teaching students basic language skills. Fourth, fifth, and sixth grade students who participated in the Developmental Writing Program scored at least as well as non-participants in reading comprehension, language mechanics, and language expression on the district's annual achievement test.

3) Students who participated in the Developmental Writing Program and in other types of writing instruction exhibited more positive attitudes toward writing at the end of the school year than at the beginning of the year. However, Developmental Writing Program participants were significantly more positive in their attitudes towards writing than students who received other types of writing instruction.

4) All first-year Developmental Writing Program teachers exhibited significantly more positive attitudes toward the teaching of writing than teachers in the non-participating group.

Discussion

Project directors are convinced that the results of this evaluation study support the Developmental Writing Program as an effective model for teaching children to write. Moreover, its training, materials, and evaluation components lend themselves to replication in other schools and settings. Project directors plan to maintain and extend the program in grades three through six throughout our district. To assure program

quality and increased growth as well as to discover more about progression of the composing process in children, annual evaluation of writing skills and classroom implementation will take place. In addition a complementary curriculum for kindergarten, first and second grade students currently being developed will facilitate the transition from early language development to formal writing.

We in Hillsborough County have changed our philosophy and practices in the area of writing instruction. Discarding the traditional, creative writing model in favor of the developmental writing process model has resulted in increased teacher commitment to writing instruction, and increased understanding of the craft of writing. As a result, students enjoy writing. Just as importantly, they have deliberate control over what they have written. They write with a "writer's eye".

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